Chief Reader Report on Student Responses:

2025 AP® English Literature and Composition Set 2 Free-Response Questions

- Number of Students Scored 417,589
- Number of Readers 1898

- Score Distribution

Exam Score	N	%At
5	67,735	16.2
4	112,395	26.9
3	129,462	31.0
2	66,211	15.9
1	41,786	10.0

- Global Mean 3.58

The following comments on the 2025 free-response questions for AP® English Literature and Composition were written by the Chief Reader, Steve Price, Mississippi College, assisted by Exam Leader, Kathy Keyes and the following reading leaders: Question 1, Exam Leaders Adenike Davidson and Kim Windsor and Question Leader Lisa Boyd; Question 2, Exam Leaders Matt Heitzman and Celine Gomez and Question Leader Shoshana Knapp; and Question 3, Exam Leaders Jason Coats and Brenda Buckley-Kuhn and Question Leader John Beynon. These comments give an overview of each free-response question and of how students performed on the question, including typical student errors. General comments regarding the skills and content that students frequently have the most problems with are included. Some suggestions for improving student preparation in these areas are also provided. Teachers are encouraged to attend a College Board workshop to learn strategies for improving student performance in specific areas.

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Question 1

Task: Poetry Analysis
Topic: Victor Hernández Cruz, "Two Guitars"
Max Score: 6
Mean Score: 3.58

	Max Points:	Mean Score:
Row A: Thesis	1	.94
Row B: Evidence and Commentary	4	2.60
Row C: Sophistication	1	.04

What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?

For Question 1, the Poetry Analysis question, students were asked to read Victor Hernández Cruz's poem "Two Guitars" and respond to the following prompt:

> In Victor Hernández Cruz's poem "Two Guitars," published in 2001, the speaker imagines that two guitars are alive and engaging in conversation about their musical experiences. Read the poem carefully. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze how Hernández Cruz uses literary elements and techniques to convey a complex portrayal of the guitars' musical world.

In a timed-writing situation and with an unfamiliar text, students were expected to complete three main tasks successfully:

Reading the poem involves more than simply understanding individual words and describing what happens. Students were expected to view the text specifically as a poem, recognizing literary elements and techniques in the context of poetry, and then analyzing how those techniques are used to shape the poem and its meaning. For example, in "Two Guitars," students might be reminded in the prompt of literary elements and identify and explore personification (like "My strings are tight and full of tears" and "I played in an apartment on 102nd street"); figurative language (like "a song is a mountain put into/Words" and "Echoes came out of hallways as if from caves"); and imagery (like the "melodious screwdrivers," "something so big in the harmony," and "Their throats gardenia gardens"). Students are also likely to notice the structure of the poem, where "The other guitar" denotes the shift from the first guitar to the second guitar. Some students will notice that the poem has an unusual syntax, with little punctuation (only a colon, which introduces the second guitar, and a period at the end). More advanced readers will pay particular attention to the details that create a distinct and different characterization for each of the guitars (like "We are always in danger of blowing up/With passion," from the first guitar; and "I've been in theaters and cabarets," for the second guitar).

Analyzing the poem means taking the relevant elements that students identified in their reading and exploring how these parts function collectively to create the meaning of the poem. In "Two Guitars," students needed to consider how the parts "convey a complex portrayal of the guitars' musical world." Given the title and introductory lines ("Two guitars were left in a room all alone" and "In this solitude they started talking to each other"), most readers will understand that the poem personifies the guitars, and they will recognize the turn from the first guitar's story to the second guitar's story at line 19. Because there are two distinct guitars, most students will recognize that each is different in some way. More advanced readers will analyze the details depicting each of the guitars and be able to name and discuss how each of the differing musical worlds is depicted: for instance, how the first guitar's world is solitary and filled with intense emotion; and, how the second guitar's world is more public and celebratory. There is space for the readers to interpret the details in

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different ways, for instance finding different meanings in the intense emotion of the first guitar. More advanced readers will recognize that the word "complex" is central to the prompt and explore the significance of these two different musical worlds. These students might, for example, focus on religious imagery in the first guitar's world ("When they squeeze me tight I bring/Down the angels who live off the chorus") and how this is juxtaposed with more earthly, everyday details for the second guitar (playing "In 1944 New York/When the Trio Los Panchos started").

Writing a well-written response means demonstrating a variety of skills. Students are asked to establish a thesis that shows understanding of the poem's complex portrayal of the guitars' musical world. They build this defensible interpretation with specific, relevant evidence from the poem and through their own commentary that explains the connection between their argument and the evidence. The more successful responses build a line of reasoning that connects ideas and shows the relationships between them. In "Two Guitars," students might choose to use the structure of the poem to organize their response: for instance, a body paragraph or section on the musical world of the first guitar; then, a body paragraph or section on the musical world of the second guitar; and a concluding section comparing and contrasting the two. Students with more successful responses will avoid merely summarizing the description of each guitar and instead analyze and interpret the details (for instance, discussing the kind of musical world the first guitar inhabits, with its intense emotion and spirituality; or considering why the second guitar might be so comfortable in a more public, even common, musical world). Alternatively, the student might situate their thesis in the context of the tension between the two guitars (suggested in the closing lines, when "The two guitars [were] hushed" and yet "there was a/Resonance in the air" as their contrasting musical worldviews lingered), with the more successful writer able to sustain that focus throughout the response (thus earning the sophistication point). A well-written response is more than grammatically correct writing, and it should be noted that students are not expected to write a polished, revised essay in the limited time allotted for the exam.

How well did the responses address the course content related to this question? How well did the responses integrate the skill(s) required on this question?

Overall, responses to Free-Response Question 1, the Poetry Analysis question, were strong, and students scored highest on this question of the three responses they wrote. "Two Guitars" was an accessible poem, both in language and theme, especially the idea that no matter our similarities, individuals will still see the world and their experiences in different ways (even if in this case those two "individuals" are personified guitars). Students generally understood the poem and what it was literally describing (the conversation between the two guitars). They recognized that their thesis should be a defensible claim about "the complex portrayal of the guitars' musical world" and constructed appropriate theses. Most responses were full, complete essays, and students had ample thoughts to convey about the musical worlds of the two guitars. In particular:

- Most students were able to read and understand the narrative of the poem, where two guitars were discussing their experiences. Although this could have been an unusual premise for them, most students grasped that personification in this poem was not a singular moment but constituted the entire poem, and that these personified instruments inhabited their own musical worlds.
- Without quotation marks, students occasionally missed the fact that the guitars were in conversation and that the poem was presenting dialogue between them.
- Most students identified literary elements—for example, personification, imagery, figurative language, and symbolism—but there is opportunity to develop their discussion of how the literary elements function in the poem and how they contribute to the portrayal of the guitars' musical world.

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- Most students recognized that the poem's structure was basically divided in half, with each guitar telling of their own experiences and observations.
- Most students had a thesis about the portrayal of the guitars' musical world. There is opportunity, though, for students to construct more precise, nuanced arguments (for instance, identifying that there were differences between the two guitars and exploring the significance of these differences). There is also opportunity for students to develop a line of reasoning in their thesis, previewing connections between the ideas they will develop in their responses.
- Most students included evidence, including direct quotations. There is opportunity, though, for students to connect the evidence more to their theses. For instance, rather than simply stating that the man who plays the first guitar "has no heart," students can think more about what that description tells us about the role of the guitar itself (how with the guitar, the man exudes emotion: "I have seen it leave out of his mouth/I have seen it melt out of his eyes").
- Some students noted the syntax, that there are only two punctuation marks (the colon introducing the second guitar and the period that concludes the poem). Often, this would be a brief reference lacking analysis and interpretation. There is opportunity for students to explore syntax further, for instance, discussing how the run-on sentences and enjambed ideas characterize the guitars and impact what they say about their musical worlds.
- There is also opportunity for students to demonstrate their sophisticated thinking. In "Two Guitars," two paths seem most accessible. First, students could focus more on tensions in the poem, like how two distinct musical worlds can coexist (if they interpret the "Resonance in the air" at the end as an unresolved potential conflict). Second, students might focus on situating their argument in a broader context, for instance, the status of marginalized, silenced speakers and how they claim agency.

What common student misconceptions or gaps in knowledge were seen in the responses to this question?

Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps	*Responses that Demonstrate Understanding*
• Some students were unable to recognize that there were two distinct guitars as speakers in conversation, likely due to the lack of quotation marks or other punctuation.	• "This poem highlights the difference between the lives of the two guitars, with one brining internal and personal enjoyment, and the other providing external mass enjoyment. The first guitar was played by an emotional man who used his music to help him release his emotions through song. The second guitar was part of a musical group that played at many venues for the enjoyment of others." • "The seperate parts with no interjection from the other guitar allows Cruz to tell the story of each guitar fully so when the second guitar is introduced the reader's perceptions of the first guitar are being projected onto the description of the second, which allows the reader to realize contrasts for both guitars for themselves in ways that would not be realized without the order, seperation, and shifts."

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• Among students who recognized two separate guitars, some only summarized each one's characteristics rather than comparing and contrasting them and developing an analysis.	• "The most obvious contrast comes through the spititual uses of the guitars. The first guitar is described to, 'bring down the angels who live off the chorus,' while the second guitar has a parallel experience in a religious practice being played 'after a baptism pregnant with women The men flirted and were offered Chicken soup.' The reverence and emotion/passion in the first guitar's religious experience seems very intense only for the second guitar to have a very casual and unpassionate experience. There is a large contrast in bringing down the angels and being casually played at a baptism. The insignificance of the second guitar is even highlighted in the details such as men and women flirting afterwards (undermining the significance of this religious event) and the chicken noodle soup. The reader may not have realized the irreverance towards the musical effect in this ceremony if not for the first guitar having such a profound effect to bring down angels. This shows that although the situation with the baptism seems easier due to it being more casual, the situation of the second guitar has a much greater impact and truly portrays the purpose of music." • "On further investigation, though, the guitar shows the human principle that pain leads to passion which leads to purpose. This guitar player experiences a pain that they rely on the guitar to help them portray to the world in a creative show of artistry which projects onto the guitar to show the beauty created from passion even though the emotions of the guitar at times seem to produce an ugly sense of pain. This is, frankly, nonexistant in the other guitar with its more casual experiences. The phrases used also help to portray the ideal of music which is in the focus of the first guitar like, 'I have seen it melp out of his eyes' (talking about tears), and 'we are always in danger of blowing up with passion.' These phrases show the absolute intensity of creating music like this. While, yes, passion and pain are strenuos and hard, this is what melds together into beauty as we cultivate a human experience where people don't need to feel bottled up and alone. While the second guitar still participates in nice experiences, it shows the fading of this passion of music as modern day

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	people opt for lives and situations that are easy until we see the inevitable destruction of this music form as seen in the last line."

Based on your experience at the AP® Reading with student responses, what advice would you offer teachers to help them improve student performance on the exam?

1. **Syntax Practice:** Teachers can offer students practice with poetry that does not use traditional syntax. For instance, they could present students with "Two Guitars" and have them punctuate the poem with punctuation, such as periods, quotation marks, exclamation points, dashes, semicolons, colons, and question marks. Working in collaborative groups, students could discuss and explain their choices and the impacts they would have on meaning and tone. Groups could also be asked to produce multiple versions of the poem to further demonstrate the impact that punctuation (or lack thereof) has on meaning.

2. **Footnotes as a Genre:** Teachers can help students utilize footnotes more consistently and effectively by teaching them as a genre. Help students see that there are conventions to footnotes and that understanding them gives us clues as to why the footnotes are included and how we should use them. For instance, footnotes tend to have concise, focused content; they are used judiciously to illuminate key information; and, since someone placed the footnote there, they are intended to be used—for the footnoted information to be applied to the interpretation. Not only can students identify and make sense of the footnoted information, but they can also analyze the impact of the footnote, asking questions like why would someone footnote this spot? And, how can I apply the information as I continue reading?

What resources would you recommend to teachers to better prepare their students for the content and skill(s) required on this question?

To better prepare students for the Poetry Analysis Free-Response Question, teachers may find the following resources helpful.

- Teachers may benefit from using the **Unit Guides** in the Course and Exam Description to pace and sequence their teaching of poetry analysis skills and to provide students with opportunities to practice these skills at increasing levels of difficulty and complexity.
- Students can develop their reading, analysis, and writing skills over the course of the year by practicing with the formative free-response questions in the **Progress Checks for Units 2, 5, and 8** on AP Classroom. Student performance on these formative assessments provides teachers with valuable data that can help inform their lesson planning throughout the year.
- The **AP Daily videos** on AP Classroom can supplement teachers' instruction as well as provide remediation for individual students who may struggle with a particular skill.
- Students can practice with summative free-response questions that appeared on previous AP English Literature and Composition exams when a teacher assigns a Poetry Analysis Free-Response Question from the **Question Bank** on AP Classroom. Teachers can simply filter the Question Type for FRQ: Poetry Analysis and/or for particular skills they'd like to have their students practice. These questions can be assigned as homework or as in-class assessments.

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- **Student Samples, Scoring Guidelines, and Scoring Commentaries** for the Poetry Analysis Free-Response Question can be found on AP Central. The Scoring Commentaries clarify how the student samples earned the various points described in the Scoring Guidelines. Reviewing the samples and commentaries with students can help teachers illustrate the difference between the construction of solid arguments and that of more precise, nuanced arguments, an important distinction highlighted in the "Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps" column in the table above.

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Question 2

Task: Prose Fiction Analysis
Topic: Jeannette Haien, *The All of It*
Max Score: 6
Mean Score: 3.38

	Max Points:	Mean Score:
Row A: Thesis	1	.93
Row B: Evidence and Commentary	4	2.42
Row C: Sophistication	1	.03

What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?

For Question 2, the Prose Fiction Analysis question, students were asked to read an excerpt from Jeannette Haien's novel *The All of It* and respond to the following prompt:

> The following excerpt is from Jeannette Haien's novel *The All of It*, published in 1986. In this passage, Father Declan, an Irish priest, is driving home after a successful fishing trip. Read the passage carefully. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze how Haien uses literary elements and techniques to develop a complex portrayal of Father Declan.

In a timed-writing situation and with an unfamiliar text, students were expected to complete three main tasks successfully:

Reading the prose passage means reading closely for both literary techniques and meaning, which can be an additional challenge for some students given the relative length and richness of the prose passage. Students were expected to view the text specifically as a prose passage, recognizing conventions particular to the genre, and then analyze how those techniques are used to shape the passage and its meaning, in this case to develop a complex portrayal of Father Declan. For example, in the excerpt from *The All of It*, students might notice the initial setting (the "lonely solitude" of "a long night drive through thrashing rain and dense, culprit fog") and Father Declan's memory of the setting he's returning to ("the bulk emptiness of the bleak parish-house"); the initial description of Father Declan (for instance, the description of his "head thrust forward, turtle-like, out of his collar" or the "ghostly haze of his own breath"); the progression of his thoughts (for instance, first he thinks "He ought to get a dog"; then, "He pictured the creature"; then, he considers the possibility, wondering "Was there anything written against a priest having a dog?" before recognizing another barrier, that "Mrs. Duggin wouldn't take to a dog"); or Father Declan's frustration at the end, that he doesn't control everything he wants in his life (for instance, "But must he forever give in to the Mrs. Duggins of the world? forever keep sublimating wishes?"). Students will find ample literary techniques to explore, like imagery, details, diction, and rhetorical questions. More advanced readers will notice the complexity of Father Declan's portrayal, how he has a range of thoughts that depict his competing desires.

Analyzing the prose passage means taking the relevant parts that students identified in their reading and thinking about how the parts function collectively to create meaning in the prose passage: in particular, how they combine to develop a complex portrayal of Father Declan. In the excerpt from *The All of It*, students might analyze the impact of setting on the portrayal of Father Declan, thinking about where Father Declan has been (the "Castle," with its "splendid excitement"), where he currently is ("a long night drive" in a "thrashing rain and dense, culprit fog," which causes in him a "violent flush of self-pity"), and where he is going (to the "bulk emptiness of the bleak parish-house, its outside walls bleeding with damp, its windows dark, its high, cold rooms devoid of life," where the "chilly chambers" bring the "ghostly haze of his own breath"). Questions can drive analysis, and there are plenty to ask in the excerpt from *The All of It*. For instance, students might ask

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what the memorable "turtle-like" image in the car says about Father Declan. Other questions the students could consider include why solitude, which is so important in religious circles (it's what Father Declan will more or less live in, when he arrives home) is seen negatively in Father Declan's mind as "the blanknesses of solitude"; and why Father Declan settles on a dog to ease discomfort. (Some questions dead-end in analysis, which is okay. But the dog could be fruitful: for instance, the dog is socially acceptable, other than to Mrs. Duggin, and safe—"man's best friend" who will always be there for him.) Some readers will see in the last paragraph that part of Father Duggin's frustration comes from a lack of agency to make the decisions he wants ("must he forever give in to the Mrs. Duggin's of the world?"). More advanced readers will tackle the entire sixth paragraph and its challenging diction (the "brilliantly prodigious, gallimaufry," the information layered into parentheses) as well as the initially ambiguous final line ("Innocent, the mere wishing of a mere wish"), considering what this all means about Father Declan and his complex portrayal.

Writing a well-written response to a prose passage means that students demonstrate the ability to establish an overall defensible thesis and build the argument through evidence and commentary, ideally constructing a line of reasoning that shows the complexity of their understanding. A challenge of any prose passage lies in the amount of evidence that students must account for and analyze, a challenge certainly present in the excerpt from *The All of It*, given the range of Father Declan's thoughts (past, present, and future, and sometimes breaking expected norms, like his questioning of the solitude required of him as a member of the clergy) as well as the sheer number of details for students to sort through (from the rain to what he anticipates at home to names of priests in Galway and even to a cat). Students with more successful responses will discuss the passage more fully, including the brief reference to Father Declan's recent experience at "the Castle" and especially the challenging final paragraph, with its rich syntax and parenthetical thoughts, linking their key points to form a line of reasoning. Or, the student might situate their thesis in the tensions Father Declan faces with his competing desires, wanting to please those around him (like Mrs. Duggin, who could also represent society more broadly) while also claiming some agency to make personal choices, with the more successful writer able to sustain that focus throughout the response (thus earning the sophistication point). It should again be noted that students are not expected in the timed exam to write a polished, revised essay but rather are engaged in a process of thinking as they explore the passage and draft their response.

How well did the responses address the course content related to this question? How well did the responses integrate the skill(s) required on this question?

Overall, responses to Free-Response Question 2, Prose Fiction Analysis, were generally solid, though this was the most challenging of the three essays that students wrote this year. The excerpt from *The All of It* was a largely accessible passage in terms of language and style (though there were some spots that posed challenges for students). Students generally understood that the passage was a description of Father Declan, that he was facing personal questions about his future, and that he was, depending on students' interpretations, at least unhappy or uncertain. In addition:

- Most students were able to read and understand the overall narrative of the passage, that Father Declan had been away, was returning home, and was concerned about the solitude that he faced.
- The stronger responses showed awareness of the range of Father Declan's thoughts, from satisfaction at his fishing trip, to a desire for a companion with whom to share his success (and his life in general), to consideration of how he might have a dog as a companion, to possible objections, and to his reluctance to succumb to those objections.
- The less-successful responses did not show understanding of the progression of his thoughts; did not realize that Father Declan was a priest (though this information was contained in the introduction to the prompt); stated that the passage disparaged his wish for a human or animal companion; or stated that he had definitely decided against a dog.

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- Most students had a thesis about Father Declan's portrayal in the passage. Often, however, the theses offered overly simplified arguments, for instance that Father Declan was unhappy, lonely, or looking for a change. As in the Poetry Analysis, there is opportunity for students to construct more precise, nuanced arguments (for instance, to explore Father Declan's competing desires and how they impact his portrayal).
- Most students were able to identify at least one literary element in the poem, with setting, sensory details, imagery, and point of view the most frequently discussed.
- Most students included evidence, including direct quotations, to support their characterization of Father Declan and to develop their thesis. There is opportunity, though, for students to use a more varied range of evidence from throughout the passage. Many students were drawn to Father Declan's thoughts about getting a dog ("a sensible puppy he could rear to companionable habits"), sometimes to the exclusion of any other evidence or sections of the excerpt. These students recognized that Father Declan wanted companionship or was unsatisfied with his current home life, but, with limited evidence, they missed the complexity of the portrayal, namely how Father Declan has competing desires, like an impossible interest in pleasing others, including both the mother he imagined approving of the dog and Mrs. Duggin, who he knew would decidedly object.
- Relatedly, while most students made individual claims about Father Declan's portrayal, there is opportunity for more students to construct a line of reasoning by connecting those ideas together and exploring how they are related to the essay's main claim.
- There is also opportunity for students to demonstrate their sophisticated thinking. In the excerpt from *The All of It*, the path of identifying and exploring complexities or tensions within the passage would seem to offer the most potential, given Father Declan's competing desires. Students might also situate their thesis within a broader context, for instance exploring the concept of self-agency or living a religious versus a secular life. Sustaining a discussion like this throughout the response will earn the student the sophistication point in Row C.

What common student misconceptions or gaps in knowledge were seen in the responses to this question?

Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps	*Responses that Demonstrate Understanding*
• Many students noted that Father Declan thought about getting a dog, though rather than exploring the complexities of why Father Declan wants a dog, students often settled for a simple explanation (for example, Father Declan was lonely).	• "Father Declan thinks about getting a dog , but said he could hear Mrs. Duggin saying 'I'm hoovering *hair*, Father, *dog* hairs,' tousling the thin of her own, her mouth dropped disapprovingly' (Par. 5). This describes a reason as to why Father Declan may be reluctant to adopt a dog in order to relieve his feelings of loneliness. He doesn't want owning the dog to inconveinience others and would rather put his own troubling asside. The italized words of 'hair' and 'dog' shows how much of a disapproval that it will be to others and his thoughts of what others might say clouds his judgment to get a companion." • "Haine would further promote Father Declan's sense of solitude through by revealing his strong

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	desire a dog as a companion. Father Declan would repeadetly speak of his wishes of 'get[ting] a dog ... one that would accompany him on walks and ride beside him.' This constant repetition of Father Declan's imagination of what joy a dog would bring him help to juxstapose his true feelings of emptiness. The idea of only a dog as a life long friend and companion developing that much joy in Father Delcan helps promote the idea of true isolation from others and lack of joy experiences throughout his daily life."
• Students often neglected the final paragraph of the excerpt in their analyses, perhaps put off by the challenging syntax, punctuation, and diction, along with the ambigiuity of the final line.	• "Haien's usage of punctuation, '?' again displays Declan's question of whether meeting his own needs or succumbing to the needs of others is the right thing to do. Moreover, the ellipsis 'sublimating' reveals Declan's feeling that he has constantly given into other people's wishes and wonders if people pleasing is truly the correct answer. Lastly, Haien hints that Declan still grapples between the morality of wanting more for himself. She finishes with, 'Innocent, the mere wishing of a mere wish' (Haien). The diction 'innocent' suggests the belief that dreaming of wanting more is okay, but actually take action to do so is not. This hints that Declan now believes, the needs of others are more important than serving himself." • "Father Declan's internals thoughts say 'as he was this instant sublimating (*burying*, or trying to) the wish (he struck the word *desire*) to share with someone this singular-in-his-life' (Par. 6). This clearly follows onto how Father Declan is trying to hide his wish to escape out of loneliness out of reluctancy. The diction of the words '*burying'* and '*desire'* is used to describe Father Declan's burying of his internal desires. He does not want to put his feelings of loneliness out in the world and gain a companion, so he chooses to bury it deep inside of him."

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Based on your experience at the AP® Reading with student responses, what advice would you offer teachers to help them improve student performance on the exam?

1. **Be Strategic with the Sophistication Point:** Empower students as writers and thinkers by helping them see that they have control over the sophistication point when they can be strategic and identify their pathway.

   Remind students that there are 4 ways for them to earn the sophistication point in Row C, by "Identifying and exploring complexities or tensions within the passage," by "Illuminating the student's interpretation by situating it within a broader context," by "Accounting for alternative interpretations of the passage," and by "Employing a style that is consistently vivid and persuasive." Let your students know that these are the concrete ways that they earn the sophistication point and that the point isn't a nebulous, subjective feeling or a fleeting and unknown trait.

   Also, encourage your students to be strategic and intentional as they think about their thesis and line of reasoning. Is there an opportunity to weave "tensions" into their thesis (like we see with Father Declan and his competing desires)? Similarly, are there broader contexts or concepts that they can use as a lens to explore the passage (like the desire for self-agency, which a student might be familiar with from Psychology)? If students can sustain those arguments over the course of the response and connect ideas by building the line of reasoning, they will be on the path to the sophistication point.

   It's important for students to know that *they create the sophistication* of their argument through their writing and commentary. The sophistication point isn't a unicorn that magically appears but rather a part of their argument (and line of reasoning) that they conceive of and construct.

2. **Be Curious about the Little Things:** It's understandable in an excerpt like the passage from *The All of It* to focus on the big details, like Father Declan's desire for a dog. Haien spent more time developing the fifth paragraph than anything else in the excerpt, and let's face it, "a lively, sensitive puppy" is just begging to grab our attention. There's plenty to analyze and interpret in that section of the passage, too, so it's not a bad thing. We just don't want students to ignore the rest of the passage or the aspects that don't jump off the page so readily.

   So, encourage students to be curious about the "little things"—those spots in a passage that are brief or singular moments; that seem unconnected to the rest of the passage (but probably are not—the author placed them there for a reason!); and that are easy to overlook, like a punctation mark. It's the punctuation that I'd love for students to pay more attention to in the Father Declan passage, like Haien's use of ellipses and parentheticals, especially in the last paragraph. That paragraph is challenging for me to read, with how quickly Haien (or the narrator) drops in a series of parenthetical thoughts. But when I focus on them and let myself be curious rather than frustrated or worried that I "won't get it," I see that the narrator is as frenetic and anxious as Father Declan himself. Or, I see how that final ellipsis gives Father Declan a moment to regroup, to stop worrying about the car engine, and to realize something about his desires and his own motivation. Sometimes curiosity will be a dead-end, and that's okay if we don't linger and we move on. Other times, like here, curiosity can open a door to greater understanding of the narrator, point of view, characterization, and so on. Encourage students to be curious and to lean into those spots that don't initially catch their eyes!

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What resources would you recommend to teachers to better prepare their students for the content and skill(s) required on this question?

To better prepare students for the Prose Fiction Analysis Free-Response Question, teachers may find the following resources helpful.

- Teachers may benefit from using the **Unit Guides** in the Course and Exam Description to pace and sequence their teaching of prose fiction analysis skills and to provide students with opportunities to practice these skills at increasing levels of difficulty and complexity.
- Students can develop their reading, analysis, and writing skills over the course of the year by practicing with the formative free-response questions in the **Progress Checks for Units 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, and 9** on AP Classroom. Student performance on these formative assessments provides teachers with valuable data that can help inform their lesson planning throughout the year.
- The **AP Daily videos** on AP Classroom can supplement teachers' instruction, as well as provide remediation for individual students who may struggle with a particular skill.
- Students can practice with summative free-response questions that appeared on previous AP English Literature and Composition exams when a teacher assigns a Prose Fiction Analysis Free-Response Question from the **Question Bank** on AP Classroom. Teachers can simply filter the Question Type for FRQ: Prose and/or for particular skills they would like to have their students practice. These questions can be assigned as homework or as in-class assessments.
- **Student Samples, Scoring Guidelines, and Scoring Commentaries** for the Prose Analysis Free-Response Question can be found on AP Central. The Scoring Commentaries clarify how the student samples earned the various points described in the Scoring Guidelines. Reviewing the samples and commentaries with students can provide teachers with examples of thesis statements that have varying levels of specificity, nuance, and complexity, a common area of struggle as noted in the "Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps" column in the table above.

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Question 3

Task: Literary Argument
Topic: Secret
Max Score: 6
Mean Score: 3.49

	Max Points:	Mean Score:
Row A: Thesis	1	.93
Row B: Evidence and Commentary	4	2.49
Row C: Sophistication	1	.06

What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?

For Question 3, the Literary Argument question, students were asked to respond to the following prompt:

> Many works of literature feature a character who holds a secret that can have broader implications for that character or other characters. For example, such secrets may create conflict, provide a source of consolation, protect characters from reality, or allow one character to manipulate other characters.
>
> Either from your own reading or from the list below, choose a work of fiction in which an important character holds a secret that affects that character's relationship with one or more other characters. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze how the effect of the character's secret contributes to an interpretation of the work as a whole. Do not merely summarize the plot.

In a timed-writing situation and without the text in hand, students were expected to complete three main tasks successfully:

Selecting a work of fiction that addresses the focus of the prompt, in this case a text with a character who holds a secret that can have broader implications for that character or other characters, is the first essential step for students. Students benefit from choosing more complex texts, ones that contain multiple viewpoints, a variety of characters or narrative arcs, and language that lends itself to interpretation. Texts with less complexity often make analysis more difficult. The list of texts offered with the prompt is meant to suggest a diverse range of options, but students do not need to limit themselves to texts on the list. Students demonstrate the appropriateness of their chosen text through their analysis and writing. It should be noted that there is no list of acceptable texts.

Analyzing the work of fiction here requires two steps. First, students are asked to identify a fictional text "in which an important character holds a secret that affects that character's relationship with one or more other characters." The prompt offers students suggestions of a variety of ways that secrets can impact another character—"such secrets may create conflict, provide a source of consolation, protect characters from reality, or allow one character to manipulate other characters." Importantly, the prompt does not define the concept of "secret" definitively but instead invites students to define the concept themselves in different or unique ways, depending on the text and character they choose. Second, students analyze "how the effect of the character's secret contributes to an interpretation of the work as a whole." In their analysis, students demonstrate both their ability to focus on the "micro" (a particular relevant character "who holds a secret that can have broader implications for that character or other characters") and to consider the "macro" (the effect of the character's secret across the broader text). Students are cautioned not to summarize the text, a reminder that the evidence they draw from the text should be used in service to analysis.

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Writing a well-written Literary Argument requires students to negotiate a range of information, including the focus of the prompt and evidence from a substantial text. In this instance, they must articulate an overall thesis about a work of fiction featuring "a character who holds a secret that can have broader implications for that character or other characters," explaining "how the effect of the character's secret contributes to an interpretation of the work as a whole." Students must develop their arguments through evidence and commentary, with more successful responses building a line of reasoning that connects ideas and shows the relationships between them. Students are not expected to use direct quotations in their response, though stronger responses use more specific, precise evidence and use the evidence as support for defensible claims rather than merely as plot summary. A well-written response is more than grammatically correct writing, and it should again be noted that students are not expected in the timed-writing context to write a polished, revised essay.

How well did the responses address the course content related to this question? How well did the responses integrate the skill(s) required on this question?

Generally, students found the prompt accessible and understood the concept of a character who holds a secret that can have broader implications for that character or other characters. They used a variety of texts to explore a character's secret and its impact on an interpretation of the work as a whole. In particular:

- Because students do not have the text in front of them in Question 3 (as they do in the poetry and prose analysis questions), understanding the prompt and concept is especially essential. Most students understood the concept of secrets (it was rare if they didn't) and were able to identify a text and a relevant and applicable character whose secret impacts that character or other characters.
- The prompt offers four ways in which a secret might impact a character. Although students are not required to use them, the suggestions were commonly utilized to good effect. For example, some students considered the multiple and contradictory effects that keeping a secret might cause. Others noted how holding a secret can generate complex internal tensions within a character. Still others were able to see how the overall meaning of the work depended on a clear understanding of the multiple ways secrecy operates in a text.
- Some students were insightful and creative in their definition of what constituted a secret and how it might affect the character or other characters. For instance, some students explored how secrets can be empowering for the person who first uncovers the secret or treated keeping secrets as a positive action when used in appropriate circumstances. The prompt affords students this opportunity, and these responses tended to explore the instances more fully and with more particular evidence.
- Most students had a thesis about the impact of a character's secret (and many included previews of potential lines of reasoning). Often, however, the theses offered overly simplified arguments, many times stating a version of the idea that the secret disrupted the status quo and changed things. As in the other two Free-Response questions, there is opportunity for students to construct more precise, nuanced arguments (for instance, to explore what motivates the person who constructs the secret, how others respond to the secret, and why the secret has the impact that it does).
- Relatedly, some students oversimplified the impact of secrets and then offered a moral platitude in place of a thesis (for instance, "no good comes of a secret").
- Most students included evidence to support their discussion of a character's secret. However, some students relied on overly general evidence (which was often in service to plot summary rather than a more specific discussion of the secret itself). There is opportunity for students to use more specific and varied evidence.
- Of the three Free Response questions, the Literary Argument saw the most students successfully achieve the sophistication point. Common paths for the sophistication point included exploring

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complexities and tensions (perhaps inherent in secrets?) and placing the argument in a broader context—for instance, how secrets and gender interact.

What common student misconceptions or gaps in knowledge were seen in the responses to this question?

Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps	*Responses that Demonstrate Understanding*
• Most students had a thesis about a character's secret and its impact. Often, however, the theses offered overly simplified arguments. There is opportunity for students to construct more precise, nuanced arguments.	• "In *Mayor of Castorbridge*, by Thomas Hardy, Henchard lied and kept secrets in order to preserve his pride, and ended up self-destructing and harming many others in the story along the way. In the end, his secrets led to the loss of everything good in his life, and humiliated him more than if he had simply owned up to his mistakes in the first place." • In August Wilson's *Fences*, "Troy's affair with another women while supporting and living with his family becomes the downfall of Troy's relationship with them, showcasing that family is permanent and should always come first."
• Some students missed opportunities to show the impact of the secret on others or to analyze how the effect of the character's secret contributes to an interpretation of the work as a whole.	• "The most impactful information that is kept from Sethe's family is the information that could have prevented the incident of Sethe killing her children. The community is as they are called suggests, is the community thatis nearby to 124 (the house Sethe's family lives in) and they used to have a good relationship with Sethe and Sethe's mother in law Baby Suggs. However, after one night Baby Suggs holds a celebration at her place, the people of the community become jealous, 'They became jealous of abundance.' (Morrison) This quote shows that despite the fact that Baby Suggs was giving them food and drinks and other nice things, that the community became jealous of her having so much to give. This jealousy leads to great tragedy, as because of this jealousy, no one from the community shares some extremely vital information from Sethe's family. Which was that they knew Schoolteacher (Sethe's former master) was going to come to 124 to try and take Sethe's children away from her. The community not telling Sethe or Baby Suggs this information of course leads to them not being able to prepare for it and making Sethe attempt to murder all her children

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	and herself. This secret not being shared to their family is essentially the reason for all of the events that take place in the novel happening, and due to this it shows the impact secrets and information can have." • "Consequently, Troy's affair shows that he values his happyiness rather than his family which is what causes family relationships to crumble. His constant living of two lives conflicts Troy's decision of whether to choose his enjoyment or family, having difficulty managing both. Although his wife Rose has been supporting him for many years, Troy decides that he values his mental state of being satisfied. Some may think Troy's idea can be seen as Troy just trying to live a happier life but rather is being selfish and bad father figure. In addition, Troy decides to expose his affair with Alberta given the fact that he got her pregnant, causing the destruction of his family. When Troy exposes his affair, Rose and Cory starts to become distant with Troy as he basically abanoned his family. After the delivery of the baby, Alberta dies from child birth which leaves Troy with a baby to take care of, with no mother, and a destroyed family who shows disgust towards him. As a result, Troy's affair caused more consequences in the end then there was reward."

Based on your experience at the AP® Reading with student responses, what advice would you offer teachers to help them improve student performance on the exam?

1. **Build a Line of Reasoning with Topic Sentences:** Topic sentences often get overlooked as a junior-high skill, a developmental step we once learned but have now moved past. This is a mistake. Effective topic sentences have so much to offer students in the AP Literature exam. First, a precise, detailed topic sentence gives the student a focus as they're writing a paragraph and helps them to select appropriate evidence and to develop relevant commentary. Second, topic sentences not only preview information to come but they also can reiterate what has previously been discussed by identifying relationships between paragraphs and ideas. In other words, they connect the ideas—what we know as building a Line of Reasoning. This really does excite me, because topic sentences give us a chance as teachers to teach students that they control the line of reasoning: they identify the key ideas; they recognize the relationships and how those ideas are connected; and they articulate the line of reasoning through the topic sentences they construct (as well as further developing the line of reasoning in their body paragraphs).

2. **One-Minute Essay:** This formative assessment can help promote flexible thinking and the sharing of ideas across the class. With a full-class text in mind (though individual choice texts could work, too),

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introduce students to a Question 3 prompt from a previous year and ask them to write for a few minutes about how it applies to their current text. The next day, using the same text, choose a new prompt and ask students for another one-minute essay. The next day, choose a new prompt and ask for another one-minute essay. There's flexibility in how the assessment is shaped and used: for instance, teachers can respond to one-minute essays individually in writing, or they can verbally comment on trends across the class. The one-minute essays help students see how different texts lend themselves to a variety of prompts, and they also offer low-stakes practice in identifying a thesis, selecting specific evidence, offering relevant commentary, and connecting ideas and building a line of reasoning.

What resources would you recommend to teachers to better prepare their students for the content and skill(s) required on this question?

To better prepare students for the Literary Argument Free-Response Question, teachers may find the following resources helpful.

- Teachers may benefit from using the **Unit Guides** in the Course and Exam Description to pace and sequence their teaching of literary argument skills and to provide students with opportunities to practice these skills at increasing levels of difficulty and complexity.
- Students can develop their literary argumentation skills over the course of the year by practicing with the formative free-response questions in the **Progress Checks for Units 3, 6, and 9** on AP Classroom. Student performance on these formative assessments provides teachers with valuable data that can help inform their lesson planning throughout the year.
- The **AP Daily videos** on AP Classroom can supplement teachers' instruction, as well as provide remediation for individual students who may struggle with a particular skill.
- Students can practice with summative free-response questions that appeared on previous AP English Literature and Composition exams when a teacher assigns a Literary Argument Free-Response Question from the **Question Bank** on AP Classroom. Teachers can simply filter the Question Type for FRQ: Prose and/or for particular skills they'd like to have their students practice. These questions can be assigned as homework or as in-class assessments.
- **Student Samples, Scoring Guidelines, and Scoring Commentaries** for the Literary Argument Free-Response Question can be found on AP Central. The Scoring Commentaries clarify how the student samples earned the various points described in the Scoring Guidelines. Reviewing the samples and commentaries with students can help teachers explain how to develop nuanced arguments and avoid oversimplification, as well as how to connect an idea, such as the implications of a character's secret, to a broader interpretation of the work, both common areas of struggle as noted in the table above.

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